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SWAMI RAMANAND TEERTH MARATHWADA UNIVERSITY, NANDED

A Proposal for Doctoral Research Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities

entitled

"REPRESENTING THE UNREPRESENTED: A STUDY OF THE FEMALE PROTOGONISTS IN THE TAJ MAHAL TRIOLOGY BY INDU SUNDARESAN."

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"REPRESENTING THE UNREPRESENTED: A STUDY OF THE FEMALE PROTOGONISTS IN THE TAJ MAHAL TRILOGY BY INDU SUNDARESAN."

1) INTRODUCTION:

Indian English Literature has set itself free of the shackles of the colonial legacy often criticized as a literature either like the British or for the British. From the early phase of imitation and later phase of protest to the British writing styles, it has gradually evolved into the new phase of self-exploration. In this final stage of maturity of Indian Writing in English the Indian authors are delving deep into the diverse, multicultural Indian society and its historical heritage for topics. There is a renewed interest in the past, be it ancient or more recent.

There is a gallery of such authors who are trying to understand the present in the light of the past or, trying to understand the past in the light of the new findings or the new perspectives. There is also an attempt to decolonize the Indian cultural scenario and fill the space thereby emptied with the tales of the past. Notable among such authors are, Devdutt Pattnaik whose books on Indian mythological characters and the great epics of India—*The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* are well known. His books *Jaya, Sita, Myth-Mithya, The Regent King* and so on are some of the well-known examples.

Though there is a new vogue in writing on historical subjects and themes, there was always a stream of historical writing in Indian English Literature. In the twenty-first century Indian writing in English, there are many notable authors who have enriched the canon through their historical fictions. Those who mostly write on the mythological and on the tales from the epics, Amish Tripathi is a household name for the readers of Indian English literature. His *Siva Trilogy* and *Ram Chandra Series* are popular. Ashwin Sanghi's novels *The Rosabal Tale, Chanakya's Chant, The Krishna Key, Sialkot Saga, The Keepers of Kalchakra* and others also bring the historical and mythological tales to the readers with new treatment to the content.

Vineet Bajpai, the author of the Harappa Series in which the novels like *Harappa: The Curse of Blood River, Pralay, Mastaan*, and *Kashi* etc. have also enriched the canon of Indian historical literature. Amitav Ghosh, the veteran Indian English writer is also known the world over for his Ibis Trilogy. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni deals with the epic tale of *The Mahabharata* from a female perspective that is, in the perspective of Draupadi. Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: A Tale of the Vanquished*, *Roll of the Dice*, and *Rise of Kali* are based on *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata.*

Despite this renewed interest of the Indian English writers in the historical and mythological subjects, there are a few books on the Mogul history of India. However, Alex Rutherford which is a pen name taken by Diana Preston and her husband, Michael Preston, have written a six-part series on the Mogul empire— *Empire of the Moghul: Raiders from the North, Empire of the Moghul: Brothers at War, Empire of the Moghul: Ruler of the World, Empire of the Moghul: The Tainted Throne, Empire of the Moghul: The Serpent's Toot*h and *Empire of the Moghul: Traitors in the Shadows*.

Besides these there are not many other notable works on the Mogul Empire except the Taj Mahal Trilogy by Indu Sundaresan. She is an Indian writer born and brought up in India now residing in USA. She received Washington State Book Award for her first novel *Twentieth Wife* which is now made into a web-series entited *Siyaasat*. She is the recipient of the Light of India award for Excellence in Literature. Her works are translated into more than 20 languages worldwide. Her Taj Mahal Trilogy is a set of these novels:

- *Twentieth Wife (2002)*
- *The Feast of Roses*
- *Shadow Princess*

Besides these three novels, she has also written three more novels—

- *In the Convent of Little Flowers,*
- *The Splendor of Silence; and*

- *The Mountain of Light.*

Her three novels entitled The Taj Mahal Trilogy—*Twentieth Wife* (2002), *The Feast of Roses* (2003), and *Shadow Princess* (2010) bring to the fore the stories of the royal harem. The history of the Mogul empire is mostly the history of the emperors. Neither in the annals of history nor in historical fiction do we find a representation of the Mogul empress. Indu Sundaresan's fictional works focus on the royal harem of the Mogul emperors across the three generations. All these three novels have female protagonists who are given a representation in these novels. This series brings the untold stories of the powerful female protagonists. These portrayals of the female protagonists need to be analysed and studies for their merit and significance.

2) STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF THE RESEARCH:

"REPRESENTING THE UNREPRESENTED: A STUDY OF THE FEMALE PROTOGONISTS IN THE TAJ MAHAL TRIOLOGY BY INDU SUNDARESAN."

3) Rationale and Significance of the Study:

The novels by Indu Sundaresan bring the questions of subaltern position of women, feminist revision of history, and the stories of the patriarchal domination of women to the anvils of Indian literary discussion. There are a few such tales dealing with the lives of the women who played a role of significance but could not find a place in the volumes of historical novels. As such, it is relevant and significant that the novels should be studied with close textual analysis for their style of writing, perspective on the history of women, the questions of subaltern voices, and the unsung tales of the female ambitions on the basis of the parameters set for the study of historical fiction. In the absence of any research on these novels, the study becomes important and the most relevant.

In the modern liberal approaches to history and literature, when the neglected, suppressed and the oppressed are finding a voice in literature, the study of the female protagonists in the novels of Indu Sundaresan will be of vital importance for paving a way for further such endeavours. The study will also throw light on the times and the place of women in shaping the time. The role of these women in the decision making process. It will be useful to the researchers and the general readers alike. In the absence of any historical novel on the Mogul era, the study of these novels will also help further research into the historical fiction in the Indian writing in English.

4) HYPOTHESIS:

1. Indu Sundaresan's historical fiction series the *Taj Trilogy* brings to the fore the unrepresented lives of the royal harem of the Mogul empire .
2. The Taj Trilogy enlightens upon the subaltern tales of female domination by male patriarchal order.
3. In the Taj Trilogy, the female protagonists' struggle, their ambitions, and the perils of the royal household find an eloquent expression.
4. Sundaresan's select novels alter the perspective of the readers regarding the Mogul empresses.
5. The three protagonists in the three select novels shaped the course of the Mogul empire through their significant role in the decision making process.

6) DATA COLLECTION:

The data required for the present research will be collected in two ways as -

1. Primary Data:

Primary data will be the novels written by Indu Sundaresan which are selected for the minute study. Those include – *The Twentieth Wife, The Feast of Roses* and *Shadow Princess: A Novel.*

2. Secondary Data:

Secondary data will be collected from the, journals, articles, different books , reviews, interviews, periodicals, newspapers, critical analysis, and web resources.

Secondary data will also be collected from personal visits to the state level, national and international conferences, workshops, seminars, etc.

7) RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Critical analysis will be the central agenda of the proposed research. The present research work does not call for any fieldwork; hence, 9th edition of the M.L.A. Research Methodology will be strictly adhered to for research citation.

8) OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH:

The doctoral research will be done with the following objectives:

1. To study the unrepresented lives of the royal harem of the Mogul empire in Indu Sundaresan's historical fiction series the *Taj Trilogy*.
2. To do a critical analysis of the tales of female domination in the light of subaltern perspectives.
3. To study the historical fiction of Indu Sundaresan for its representation of the female protagonists
4. To critically analyse the characterization on the basis of the issues of gender and class.
5. To do a critical evaluation of the Taj Trilogy for their significance and relevance.

CHAPTERIZATION:

Chapter - I : Introduction

The first chapter will focus on the general review of Indian English Literature. It will illustrate the various terms and jargon of the present doctoral research. Further, it will furnish a critical overview on the Indian writing in English by the female authors on the basis of their topics, issues, gender representation and their significance. It will also remark upon the historical fiction in India and the representation of female characters in it. A brief

biographical sketch of the selected author will also be a part of this chapter. The chapter will also contain a brief overview of the research methodology, limitations and a brief summary of the thesis.

Chapter - II: The Twentieth Wife

The first book in the *Taj Mahal* trilogy, *The Twentieth Wife* (2002), is Indu Sundaresan's debut work of romantic historical fiction. It tells the story Mehrunnisa. She is often hailed as of one of India's most controversial and brilliant empresses. It is noteworthy that though she shaped the decision-making process by her strong will and power, she does not find her mention in either history of historical fiction. In this chapter a critical analysis of the female protagonist will be done on the basis of her characterization, her personality traits, and her position in the power dynamics in order to reach at at a critical evaluation. Mehrunnisa being a Persian refugee, exhibits an example of an ambitious woman whom Emperor Jahangir married.

Chapter - III : The Feast of Roses

In the Taj Trilogy, *The Feast of Roses* is the second novel. The second novel is written in succession to the first novel which deals with the life of Noor Jehan. Actually, Noor Jehan is the name given by Emperor Jahangir. In this novel, her transition from Mehrunnisa to Noor Mahal and Noor Jahan is also representative of her transition from a refugee girl to the most powerful woman in the royal harem of Jehangir. In this novel, Indu Sundaresan presents the life of Noor Jahan in detail. In this chapter, a critical analysis of the characterisation and the adherence of the writer to the historical facts will be carried out in order to reach a critical evaluation of the historical fiction by Indu Sundaresan. In this chapter The portrayal of the life of Noor Jahan will be critically evaluated on the basis of its literary merits and the criteria of literary journal historical fiction. The website of Indu Sundaresan comments on the character that, "Mehrunnisa, or Empress Nur Jahan, becomes Jahangir's twentieth and last wife at the age 34, after a lifetime of longing for him. She is the first woman he married for love and

as a result he gradually gives her roles and responsibilities usually strictly reserved for males".

Chapter - IV : Shadow Princess: A Novel

The last book in the series is *Shadow Princess*. The novel deals with the eldest daughter of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan—princess, Jahanara. After the death of Mumtaz Mahal, Jahanara is in control of the royal harem. Jahanara shows exceptional qualities of leadership and political tactics in this third novel of the Taj Trilogy. The construction of Taj Mahal is at the backdrop of this novel. Jahanara is shown as a powerful empress of the Mogul empire. In this chapter, the character analysis of the female protagonist will be carried out in order to reach at a conclusion regarding the characterisation and the representation of female sensibilities and female lived experiences. The conclusions regarding the same will be drawn after critical analysis of the female protagonist.

Chapter – V: Conclusion

The final chapter will be a summary of the overall findings of the research. Along with certain concluding remarks, it explains the thematic concerns of Indu Sundaresan's Three Novels namely *The Twentieth Wife, The Feast of Roses and Shadow Princess: A Novel.* Finally, it will be rounded-up by advising the scope for the further research.

9) PROBABLE DATE OF RESEARCH COMPLETION:

The present research is proposed to be completed within the time limit as stipulated by the university.

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